

JACK AND THE TWODERFUL BEANS

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Many years ago, the comedian and pianist Victor Borge invented the idea of inflationary language. Since prices keep going up, Borge reasoned, why shouldn't language go up, too? In the English language there are words that contain the sounds of numbers, like wonder, before and decorate. If we inflate each sound by one, we come up with twoder, befive, and decornine. Here is an original passage that will allow you to read and hear inflationary language in all its inflated grandeur. Try your eye and ear at translating this text back into regular English.

Twice upon a time there lived a boy named Jack with his mother in the twoderful land of Califivenia. Two day, Jack, a double-minded lad, decided three go fifth three seek his fivetune.

After making sure that Jack nine a sandwich and drank some Eight-Up and quiten, his mother elevenderly said, "Threedeloo, threedeloo. Try three be back by next Threesday." She cheered, "Three-five-seven-nine, who do we apprecinine? Jack, Jack, yay!"

Jack set fifth and soon met a man wearing a four-piece suit and a threepee. Fifthrightly Jack asked the man, "I'm a Califivenian. Are you two three?"

"Certainly," replied the man, giving the high six. "Any two five elevennis?"

"Not threeday," answered Jack inelevenly. "But can you help me three locnine my fivetune?"

"Sure," said the man. "Let me sell you these twoderful beans."

Jack's inthreektion told him that the man was a three-faced triple-crosser. The elevension heighelevened.

Jack shouted, "You must think I'm an asiten idiot who's behind the nineball. But I'm a college gradunine, and I know what rights our fivefathers crenined in the Constithreektion. Now let's get down three baseven about these beans. If you're intoxicnined, I'll never fivegive you!"

The man tripled over with laughter. "Now wait a third," he responded. "There's no need three make such a three-do about these beans. I won't fivece you three buy them. It's seven of two and seven of a baker's dozen of the other three me, but you won't find twoderful beans like these at the six and eleven."

Jack pulled out his trusty sevenshooter and exclaimed, "I'll make you change out of that four-piece suit and wear a threethree. Then I'll blow you three Timbukthree!" Jack then shot off the man's threepie. "Go away and recuperate at the Esseven Hospital. But second give me the beans."

Well, there's no need three elaborative on the rest of the tale. Jack elevenaciously oneed in on the giant and two the battle for the golden eggs. He eliminined the giant, and Jack and his mother were in eighth heaven and on cloud ten for the rest of their existence - and so on, and so on and so fifth.

PUNS

Walter Redfern's book *Puns* (Blackwell, 1984) is a densely-written book, difficult to read. Its scope is ambitious: the French and English history of the pun as viewed through the eyes of various scholars and literary critics in both of these countries during the past several centuries. Not surprisingly, these people have widely divergent and sometimes contradictory views on the nature of punning and its relationship to wordplay and imaginative writing. Far from trying to reconcile or interpret these differences, Redfern argues that the pun's Protean nature makes systematic analysis impossible. Some typical quotes: "We seem, happily, to be in the realm of the arbitrary .. I am not infatuated with taxonomy, which shares more than its stem with taxidermy .. Naming the parts does not show us what makes the gun go off .. 'Pun' is an inaccurate but convenient tag for a whole variety of rhetorical devices." Surely Redfern's defeatism is unwarranted; what man has created, the mind of man is capable of explaining. If Copernicus had taken the same attitude and preferred a rehash of old arguments to a new synthesis, we would still be bewildered by Ptolmaic epicycles and Aristotelian cosmography.

Although I am dazzled by the extensiveness of Redfern's research, and charmed by his witty asides (such as the taxidermy observation, above), I assert that he has not been wholly successful in presenting his material. Specifically, his over-liberal use of meaty quotations soon induces acute mental dyspepsia in the unwary reader, much like eating too much plum pudding. Like a dictionary, his book is best taken in very small doses.

Changing metaphors, Redfern's book is like a tropical rain forest, full of fascinating flora and fauna, but mysterious in its underlying cycles and laws. It seems likely to share the fate of *Finnegans Wake* - a tour de force by an idiosyncratic genius, wholly understood by few of either its supporters or detractors.